

Positive Feedback

Collectors are turning over a new Leaf Hound

In late 1970 in a recording studio in Mayfair, London, the five musicians of the band Leaf Hound laid the tracks down for an album that they believed would be their ticket to international stardom. "The recording was done in an 11-hour session at Spot Studios," said Leaf Hound singer Pete French. "The vibe was very positive, and the musicians were really terrific players." Taking their name from a dog who came back from the dead in Ray Bradbury's short story *The Emissary*, the members of Leaf Hound included vocalist French; his cousin, guitarist Mick Halls; brothers Stuart and Derek Brookes on bass and rhythm guitar; and drummer Keith Young. Shortly after recording the album, titled *Growers Of Mushroom*, the Brookes brothers left the band and were replaced by Ron Thomas, who took over on bass. Often compared to Led Zeppelin and Free, the band was anxious to release its rock and blues debut and embark on an extensive tour of Europe and America promoting the album. However, the group's label dropped the ball on its release. Although Telefunken licensed a condensed version of the Decca album for sale in Germany, the official release wasn't made available in the rest of Europe or America. A few months later the group broke up, and the 3,000 official copies of the album (Decca SKL-R 5094) were finally released, a year later, into the abyss.

Some 35 years later, in Harrison Township, Mich., Lloyd Okaji was sorting through his massive record collection, located in two houses and one store. "You can't park a car in the garage because of all of the records," he said. "I started collecting records in the late 1960s, when I moved to Michigan from Hawaii. At first I just accumulated records, and then once in a while I would sell some duplicates. And then, after a while, it became full-time job, because I had so much inventory. Actually, I don't think I could clear all of this stuff out in two lifetimes."

Among the handful of albums Okaji pulled out to sell was a record he had stockpiled for several years, one of the remaining known copies of *Growers Of Mushroom*. "I knew this one was rare and worth something." In 2003, a copy of the album sold on eBay for \$1,476. A year later another LP surfaced and sold for \$1,531. On Jan. 20, Okaji readily posted his disc on the online auction site. Seven days later, the album sold for \$2,716 to a Japanese collector.

"I must be one of the few artists who can honestly say that I would have been rich if I had bought my own records," said French. "Unfortunately I only possess one copy. But I'm absolutely thrilled, on a personal level. It certainly is a unique experience to find that the music, which was written three-and-a-half



decades ago, is now being welcomed back and being well received."

When Leaf Hound broke up in 1971, French went on to take the mic in legendary groups such as Atomic Rooster and Cactus. After he concluded his days as a band member, he found work as a successful guest vocalist. It was at one of these shows where he discovered a resurgence, some 30 years later, for Leaf Hound music. "I was singing with Vanilla Fudge at The Camden Underworld in London, where I was surprised to find out that there had been new, younger bands playing our music. Apparently we had a considerable cult following."

With renewed interest, in 2004, French teamed up with Luke Rayner on lead guitar, Ed Pearson on bass, and Jimmy Rowland on drums, to re-form Leaf Hound. It wouldn't take long before French found himself back in the studio. "At present we have nearly finished recording a new Leaf Hound album, titled *Unleashed*," he said. "I look forward to the future."

While Leaf Hound's rebirth has fans clamoring to hear new material, it's the better-late-than-never accolades for the band's original music that provides the biggest twist of fate for French. The song "Freelance Fiend," from *Growers Of Mushroom*, was featured in the 2006 motion picture *Breakfast On Pluto*, starring Liam Neeson. And in October 2005, *Growers Of Mushroom* was voted the #1 most collectible rock album in *Q* magazine.

Fans unable to plop down almost \$3,000 for the original Decca album can hear the music, completely remastered on compact disc, courtesy of the Repertoire record label. The disc, released in 2005, comes complete with new liner notes and a bonus track, "Too Many Rock And Roll Times."

Have you discovered a long-lost group's recording on an online auction site? Let me hear about it. You can contact me via my Web site, www.isleafwrite.com.

— Lisa Wheeler

Web site of interest
www.leafhound.net